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## THE QUESTION BOX

*The Wisconsin Historical Library has long maintained a bureau of historical information for the benefit of those who care to avail themselves of the service it offers. In "The Question Box" will be printed from time to time such queries, with the answers made to them, as possess sufficient general interest to render their publication worth while.*

### THE FIRST SETTLER OF BARABOO

I am not able to fix the exact date when Abraham Wood came to Baraboo. What is the opinion of the staff as to the time? He was supposed to be the first permanent settler. A line will be appreciated.

H. E. COLE,  
*Baraboo, Wisconsin.*

We appreciate your difficulty in determining the time of the advent of Abraham Wood on your river, because of the conflict in the authorities. So far as we can determine, the account in the *Wisconsin Historical Atlas* seems to be the most authoritative. The sketches in this volume were carefully written, and were obtained from survivors then alive. According to that statement the first man who attempted settlement at the Baraboo Rapids in 1837 was Archibald Barker, who then lived at Portage. He was driven off by the Indians. Meanwhile the treaty at Washington had been negotiated, and there seemed more hope that a settlement might be made. In the spring or early summer of 1839 a man named James Alban discovered Devil's Lake, and he went back to Portage and told Eben Peck, first settler at Madison. Peck had just sold out at the latter place to Robert Ream, and he and Alban set out up the Baraboo and marked out a site at the Rapids, including the water power. As Peck was going back (after a stay of some weeks), apparently he met Wallace Rowan and Abraham Wood, whom he had known well at Madison, coming up from Portage. They staked out their claim at Lyons, where Wood spent the winter.

In the meanwhile James Van Slyke came up from Walworth County in the fall of 1839 and determined to jump Peck's claim. Van Slyke had had his claim at Lake Geneva jumped by other parties, and was in a bitter and retaliatory frame of mind. After staking out his claim to the rapids of the Baraboo he went back to Walworth and interested James Maxwell in a plan for a mill and persuaded him to furnish the irons and equipment. Van Slyke went up in the spring of 1840 and built a dam which was carried out by the freshet of June. Meanwhile, Peck had brought his claim before the court at Madison and obtained judgment against Van Slyke. The latter had already abandoned the enterprise. Van Slyke sold his irons to Wood and Rowan, who during the summer started a sawmill at the upper rapids.

There seems to be every evidence that the source of this account was the Peck family, who were in a position to know the facts. If this account is true, we suppose Wood might be called the first settler, since he remained in the vicinity during the winter of 1839-40; but no doubt he lived as the Indians did, if not with them, since his wife was a squaw. He was thus not much more of a first settler than Barker, Alban, Rowan, Peck, or Van Slyke.

To return to Wood. We are unable to discover when or how he came to Wisconsin. He was probably a free trapper or trader, one of the rough frontiersmen of Scotch descent from the backwoods of Canada. In the course of trade he came in contact with the Decorah chiefs and took to wife one of the daughters of the tribe. He had probably been on the Baraboo often before 1839, since his squaw's native village was near its mouth, and there her father died in 1836. Wood was not then at the Baraboo, since he was wintering near Madison. He was not at this site in 1832, so sometime between that date and 1836 he set up his wigwam at Squaw Point on Third Lake opposite the modern city of Madison.

His neighbor at this place was Wallace Rowan, a rough, good-hearted frontiersman from Indiana with a white wife. There is a good account of Rowan in *History of Dane County* (Chicago, 1880), 382-83. Rowan seems to have permitted Wood to place his wigwam, or whatever kind of dwelling he had, on his claim, which he entered with William B. Long in 1835.

Wood was on Third Lake during the winter of 1836-37, and during the summer of 1837 he aided in building Madison, being employed as a mechanic on Peck's log house. It seems probable that Wood spent the winter of 1837-38 at the same place, as there is no record of him at Portage before the spring of 1838. Probably he moved away from Squaw Point because Rowan that spring sold his claim and improvements to William B. Slaughter. Rowan moved to Poynette and opened his noted tavern. Wood went to Portage, where, no doubt, he had often been before with the relatives of his squaw.

In 1838 work was begun on the Portage canal, and Wood opened a house of liquid refreshment just below Carpenter's on the Wisconsin River. There, probably in the spring of 1839, Wood killed Pawnee Blanc, a noted Winnebago chief. Wood's brother-in-law, John T. La Ronde, tells the sordid story in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, VII, 360. He does not give the date of the murder; Moses Paquette says (*idem*, XII, 431) that it was in 1837. Paquette probably remembered that it was after his father's death in 1836; but it could hardly have been in 1837 since Wood was then at Madison. Our inference is that the death of Pawnee Blanc occurred in 1838 or 1839. Wood was probably anxious to leave Portage at this time; moreover in 1839 Winfield Scott went to Portage and held a council with the Winnebago concerning their removal from Wisconsin. Wood knew the Baraboo Valley would soon be open for settlement. He persuaded his old friend, Rowan, to go prospecting with him. But on their way out they found Peck and Alban had been there before them. Wood, not wanting to go back to Portage, spent the winter in the Baraboo woods; and the next autumn (1840) with Wallace Rowan began a sawmill, as La Ronde states (*Wis. Hist. Colls.*, VII, 360).

The foregoing hypothesis appears to reconcile all the accounts except Moses Paquette's date of the killing of Pawnee Blanc. The record of Wood's trial may sometime come to light. Possibly it may be preserved in the records of the court of Brown County, still kept at the courthouse at Green Bay.